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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of principals toward ability grouping in the public schools of South Carolina were studied, emphasizing the degree to which principals feel that ability grouping contributes to the quality of education. Also examined were differences in attitudes of elementary school and secondary school principals (black and white, male and female, and experienced and inexperienced), and the contribution of the majority population of the school toward principal attitude. All principals in South Carolina public schools were asked to complete a questionnaire, and 514 replied. Data were analyzed by measures of central tendency, Pearson product-moment correlation, and chi square. Results indicate that principal attitudes cannot be construed as supporting ability grouping, and that there were no expressed differences for elementary school and secondary school principals. Years of experience, gender, race, and school composition do not affect principals' expressed attitudes. Principals generally express support for the statement that ability grouping is beneficial for minority students, but they also indicate that it often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups, and that teacher expectations of poor or black students are often lower than those for other students. Thirteen tables present study findings. An appendix contains the survey form. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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ED 364 634

AN ASSESSMENT OF PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ABILITY GROUPING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

A Study Presented

By

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and

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June 1991

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ABSTRACT

AN ASSESSMENT OF PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ABILITY GROUPING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

(June, 1991)

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The primary purpose of this study was to assess the attitude of principals toward ability grouping in the public schools of South Carolina. In particular, this study sought to determine the degree to which principals feel that ability grouping/tracking can contribute to the quality of education in their schools.

Therefore, the major research question was:

Do principals express attitudes toward ability grouping that can be characterized as supportive and facilitative?

In addition, the following subsidiary questions were examined:

1. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of elementary and secondary principals toward ability grouping?

2. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to years of experience as a principal?

3. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of male and female principals toward ability grouping?

4. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of black and white principals toward ability grouping?

5. Is there a difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the student population of their school.

6. Is there a difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the percentage of minority students in their school.

In order to determine if there were any aspects of ability grouping in which principals appear to be more unsupportive or supportive, the investigators analyzed the expressed attitudes of principals on four individual statements:

1. Ability grouping is beneficial for minority students.
2. Ability grouping plans often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups.
3. Being poor or black causes teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to the bottom group.
4. Parents are given an opportunity to help decide which tracks their child is assigned.

To ascertain this information, all principals in the public schools of South Carolina were asked to participate in this survey during the 1989-90 school year. Data were collected from principals who completed a questionnaire developed by investigators. The questionnaire, Ability Grouping Assessment Form, is divided into two parts. Part One focuses on background information such as sex, ethnic affiliation, school division currently administering, number of years experience as a principal, student population and percentage of minority students. Part Two of the questionnaire consists of a series of statements designed to elicit categorical responses from principals relative to specific ability grouping proposals. A total of 514 principals responded to the investigator's request to participate in this survey.

The three statistical procedures used to analyze the data were: (1) measures of central tendency, (2) Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and (3) chi-square. In regard to the major research question and the six subsidiary research questions that this survey sought to answer, the primary findings were as follows:

1. This group of principals expressed attitudes toward ability grouping that can not be characterized as supportive and facilitative.

   A. There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of elementary and secondary principals toward ability grouping.

   B. There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to years of experience as a principal.

   C. There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of male and female principals toward ability grouping.

   D. There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of black and white principals toward ability grouping.

   E. There was no significant difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the student population of their school.

   F. There was no significant difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the percentage of minority students in their school.

Pertinent to specific aspects of ability grouping, there were the following additional findings:

- These principals expressed support for the statement that ability grouping is beneficial for minority students.

- These principals expressed support for the statement that ability grouping plans often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups.

- These principals expressed support for the statement that being poor or black causes teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to lower groups.

- These principals expressed support for the statement that parents are given an opportunity to help decide which tracks their child is assigned.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ABILITY GROUPING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

INTRODUCTION

Ability grouping has long been a controversial topic in education in this country. Grouping students according to ability is one of the most persistent practices in schools, especially secondary schools. Educators have argued about the effects of grouping from the beginning. Since researchers and those who review research have been unable to reach a consensus regarding the advantages of ability grouping, the overriding message seems to be that nothing has been established with certainty.

There is support in the literature for within-class ability grouping. Slavin (1986) found evidence that ability grouping is maximally effective when it is done for only one or two subjects and students are studying in heterogenous classes for most of the day.

Strike (1983) reports that even though there is debate concerning the effectiveness of ability grouping, most recently, the controversy concerns the fairness of it.

Ability grouping/tracking has been defined as grouping students into course sequences and classrooms on the basis of personal qualities, performances, or aspirations. Approximately 90% of high schools engage in some form of tracking (NEA, 1968).

Two majors questions surface regarding tracking: (1) Is there a class bias involved? (2) Does tracking have any noteworthy impact on the educational outcomes?

Vanfossen, Jones, and Spade (1987) found that prior research indicated that the results of curriculum tracking fell into three categories. Specifically, one group of researchers (Breton, 1970; Schafer and Olexa, 1971; Rosenbaum, 1976; Alexander, Cook and McDill, 1978; Alexander and Eckland, 1980; Eder, 1981; Oakes 1982; and Morgan 1983;) all presented evidence that tracking helps to maintain and perpetuate class status from one generation to another by sorting children from different backgrounds into different curricula programs where they are exposed to differential treatments and encounter different learning environments. Another group of reseachers suggest that tracking plays a minimal role in status maintenance because students are placed into tracks more on the basis of ability and motivation than on the basis of class membership (Rehberg and Rosenthal, 1978; Heyns, 1974; Davis and Haller 1981; Alexander and Cook, 1982). The third category implies that the debate may be irrelevant, because tracking in high school does not have a significant impact upon achievement, values, and educational outcomes (Jencks et. al., 1972; Sewell and Hauser, 1980; Alexander and Cook, 1982; Kulik and Kulik, 1982). Jenck et. al (pp. 34, 107) concluded that "neither track nor curriculum assignment seems to have an appreciable effect on students cognitive development".

Vanfossen, Jones, and Spade (1987), addressed the role of tracking in the perpetuation of status advantage by focusing on three questions: (1) Does the pattern of recruitment of students into the different curricular programs reveal a class bias? (2) Does tracking at the high school level have any significant impact on achievement, values and educational outcomes? (3) Are there any concrete classroom or school experiences related to achievement that vary by track

assignment?

Findings regarding these questions were as follows:

First, chances that a student will be in the top academic track are 53% if that student is in the top socio-economic status (SES) quartile; and only 19% if he is in the bottom SES quartile. The chances that a student will be in a vocational track are 10% if he is in the top SES quartile and 30% if he is in the bottom SES quartile. Regardless of the reason for getting there, (prior academic performance, grades, teachers' recommendations, or educational aspirations, all of which are influenced by socioeconomic background), there are substantial differences among social classes in ultimate track destination. Secondly, the correlation coefficient was relatively small regarding the aforementioned question #2, but we should be aware that a small unique influence over a 2-year period may signify a larger influence over the total period in which the students are enrolled in school. A number of authors have suggested that tracking begins as early as the first grade and that tracking decision made at the higher levels may be based on tracking patterns established earlier. The cumulative impact may be substantial. Finally, findings of the Vanfossen study are consistent with other reports indicating that classes in the academic track are more serious, spend more time on task, spend less time handling discipline, and place a greater emphasis upon learning.

In view of these findings, the impact of tracking or ability grouping on minority students in the South Carolina school system needs to be examined. Since principals are in a key position to enhance the development of a proper climate for upgrading schools there is a need for useful information pertinent to the feelings

of principals toward specific operational ability grouping patterns and procedures.

It is with this orientation that the practice, procedures, trends and ramifications of tracking in the state of South Carolina are being investigated.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the attitude of principals toward ability grouping/tracking in the public schools of South Carolina. In particular, this study sought to determine the degree to which principals feel that ability grouping/tracking can contribute to the quality of education in their schools. It sought to determine if the principals in this state's public school system express attitudes toward ability grouping that are more supportive and facilitative.

Therefore, the major research question was:

> Do principals express attitudes toward ability grouping that can be characterized as supportive and facilitative?

In addition, the following subsidiary questions were examined:

1. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of elementary and secondary principals toward ability grouping?
2. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to years of experience as a principal?
3. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of male and female principals toward ability grouping?
4. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of black and white principals toward ability grouping?
5. Is there a difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the student population of their school?

6. Is there a difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the percentage of minority students in their school.

To ascertain this information, all principals in the public schools of South Carolina were asked through their district office to participate in this survey during the 1989-90 school year. Data were collected from 514 principals who returned a questionnaire developed by the investiagtors. The questionnaire, Ability Grouping Assessment Form, is divided into two primary parts. Part One focuses on background information such as sex, ethnic affiliation, school division currently administering, and number of years experience as a principal, student population, and percentage of minority students. Part Two of the questionnaire includes sixteen (16) statements designed to elicit categorical responses from principals relative to specific ability grouping proposals. Each attitudinal statement in Part Two was an expression of desired behavior and constructed so as to conform with the attitude measurement scale model developed by Likert (1967). A total of 403 principals responded to the investigator's request to complete the questionnaire used in this survey (Table 1).

The three statistical procedures used to analyze the data were: (1) measures of central tendency, (2) Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and (3) chi-square. For the purpose of this study, the investigator selected to report Pearson-Product-Moment Correlation, and chi-square results at the .05 level of confidence.

Based on the questionnaire, the subjects in this study were classified according to their expressed attitudes toward certain activities deemed pertinent to ability grouping/tracking. Respondents indicated the degree to which they agreed or

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON RESPONDENTS (Questions 1-6)

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percent
1. Division of School Administration	Elementary	227	57.5%
	Secondary	176	42.5%
2. Years of Experience As Principal	Less than 1	28	6.9%
	1-3	68	16.9%
	4-6	96	23.8%
	7-9	52	12.9%
	10-12	54	13.4%
	Over 12	105	26.1%
			29.8%
3. Sex	Male	283	76.2%
	Female	120	29.8%
4. Ethnic Affiliation	White	307	76.2%
	Black	94	23.3%
	Others	2	.4%
5. Student Population of Respondents' Schools	Less than 300	54	13.4%
	301-600	162	40.2%
	601-900	120	29.8%
	901-1200	42	10.4%
	1201-1600	12	3.0%
	1601-2000	12	3.0%
	Over 2000	1	.2%
6. Percentage of Minority Students	Less than 10%	45	11.2%
	10% to 25%	84	20.9%
	25% to 50%	140	34.8%
	Over 50%	133	33.1%

disagreed with each statement by circling one of five possible options ("Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Unsure" "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"). On a continuum of one (1) to five (5), "Strongly Disagree" responses were assigned a value of one (1) and "Strongly Agree" responses were assigned a value of five (5). For the purposes of this study, respondents with a means score ranging from 1.0 to 3.0 were considered to have expressed unsupportive attitudes toward ability grouping. On the other hand, respondents with a mean score ranging from 3.1 to 5.0 were considered to have expressed supportive attitudes toward ability grouping.

Results of this data analysis is presented in three parts. Part One analyzes mean score responses for all 16 attitudinal statements on the Ability Grouping Assessment Form in 1990 (Table 2). Part Two focuses on Pearson Product-Moment Correlation results (Table 3) and chi-square results (Tables 4-9) pertinent to the attitudinal statements. Part three analyzes mean score responses for four specific aspects of ability grouping.

THE FINDINGS

An analysis of the data will follow the presentation of the major research questions, each of the six subsidiary research questions and additional findings. A summary of the findings will also be presented.

Part I

Major Research Questions One: Do principals express attitudes toward ability grouping that can be characterized as supportive and facilitative?

In order to answer the first major research question, the investigator ascertained the total mean score response of each respondent for all attitudinal

statements (questions 7-22) on the Ability Grouping Assessment Form. As stated earlier, respondents with a mean score ranging from 1.0 to 3.0 were considered to have expressed unsupportive attitudes toward ability grouping. On the other hand, respondents with a mean score ranging from 3.1 to 5.0 were considered to have expressed supportive attitudes toward ability grouping. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the total mean score response for all respondents on the instrument had to be 3.1 or above in order for the expressed attitude of principals to be characterized as supportive and facilitative.

Table 2 shows that .2% of the respondents had mean scores within the range of 1.0 to 1.9 and 7.7% of the respondents had mean scores within the range of 2.0 to 2.9. Also,83.9% of the respondents had a mean score within the range of 3.0 to 3.9. and 8.2% of the respondents had mean scores within the combined range of 4.0 to 5.0. The mean score tabulated for all principals on the instrument (questions 7-22) was 3.0. Since the total mean score for all respondents was less than 3.1, it is concluded that the expressed attitudes of these principals toward ability grouping can not be characterized as supportive and facilitative.

Part II

Subsidiary Research Questions:

1. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of elementary and secondary principals toward ability grouping?
2. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to years of experience as a principal?
3. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of male and female principals toward ability grouping?

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES TO PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ABILITY GROUPING
(Questions 7-22)*

Mean score Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score Range
Strongly unsupportive	1	.2	1.0-1.9
Unsupportive Responses	31	7.7	2.0-2.9
Neutral Responses	338	83.9	3.0-3.9
Supportive Responses	33	82.9	4.0-4.9
Strongly Supportive Responses	0	0	5.0
TOTAL	403	100	1.0-5.0

*Mean Score = 3.00

Standard Deviation = .41

4. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of black and white principals toward ability grouping?

5. Is there a difference in the expressed attitude of principals toward ability grouping relative to the student population of their schools?

6. Is there a difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to the percentage of minority students in their schools.

In order to answer the six subsidiary research questions, the investigators employed Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Table 3) and chi-square (Tables 4-9) to determine both the extent of the relationship between mean score responses and the degree to which these responses were representative of the group as a whole, respectively. The selected demographic variables were division of administration, experience as a principal, sex, ethnic affiliation, student population, and percentage of minority students).

Specifically, to answer the first subsidiary question, the investigators analyzed the relationship between the total mean score responses of elementary and secondary principals on the instruments. Tables 3 and 4 both indicate the difference between the total mean scores for these groups were not significant at the .05 level of confidence or higher. On the bases of this analysis, it may be determined that both elementary and secondary principals hold attitudes toward ability grouping that can not be characterized as supportive and facilitative.

To answer the second subsidiary question, the investigators will analyzed the relationship between the total mean score of principals on the instrument relative to years of experience as a principal. Table 3 and 5 both indicate that the

TABLE 3

CORRELATION BETWEEN SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES (Questions 1-6) AND EXPRESSED ATTITUDES OF PRINCIPALS ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22)

Variable	Correlation
Division of Administration	.08*
Experience as Principal	-.03*
Sex	-.11*
Ethnic Affiliation	-.03*
Student Population	.00*
Percentage of Minority Students	.06*

*P <.05

TABLE 4

CROSSTABULATION OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22) WITH DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATION OF RESPONDENTS (Question 1)

Response Category	Division of Administration Frequency		Total	Chi-Square
	Elementary	Secondary		
Strongly Unsupportive	1	0	1	
Unsupportive	20	11	31	
Neutral	190	140	330	3.72*
Supportive	16	17	33	
Strongly Supportive	0	0	0	
TOTAL	227	168	395	

*P<.05

TABLE 5

CROSSTABULATION OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22) WITH EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS (Question 2)

Response Category	Years of Experience as Principal Frequency						Total	Chi-Square
	Less than 1	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 9	10-12	Over 12		
Strongly Unsupportive	0	0	1	0	0	1		
Unsupportive	1	7	6	4	10	31		
Neutral	22	58	81	44	88	338		12.02*
Supportive								
Strongly Supportive	5	3	8	4	6 7	33		
TOTAL	28	68	96	52	105	403		

*P<.05

difference between principals relative to experience were not significant at the .05 level of confidence or higher. On the basis of this analysis, it may be concluded that there is no appreciable association between years of experience and the attitudes school principals hold toward ability grouping.

To answer the third subsidiary question, the investigators analyzed the relationship between the total mean score of male and female principals on the instrument. Tables 3 and 6 both indicate that the difference between the total mean score for these two groups were not significant at the .05 level. This analysis, shows independence of the sex of these principals and their expressed attitudes toward ability grouping.

To answer the fourth subsidiary question, the investigators analyzed the relationship between the total mean score of black and white principals on the instrument. Tables 3 and 7 both present statistics which reveal that the responses of these two groups reflect no appreciable difference in the relative figures. On the basis of this analysis, it may be concluded that attitudes held by these groups of principals toward ability grouping are similar and differences can not be attributed to their ethnic group.

To answer the fifth subsidiary question, the investigators analyzed the relationship between the total mean score of principals relative to the student population of their school. The Chi-Square analysis (Table 8) rejects the hypothesis that the responses of the principals are dependant on the student population of their school. This can also be visualized in the crosstabulation between the two variables, where most of the cases fall in the Unsupportive or the Neutral Responses but no appreciable difference in the relative figures. The

TABLE 6

CROSSTABULATION OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22) WITH SEX OF RESPONDENTS (Question 3)

Response Category	Sex Frequency Male	Female	Total	Chi-Square
Strongly Unsupportive	0	1	1	
Unsupportive	18	13	31	
Neutral	239	99	338	5.75*
Supportive	26	7	33	
Strongly Supportive	0	0	0	
TOTAL	283	120	403	

*P<.05

TABLE 7

CROSSTABULATION OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22) WITH ETHNIC AFFILIATION OF RESPONDENTS (Question 4)

Response Category	Ethnic Affiliation Frequency			Total	Chi-Square
	White	Black	Other		
Strongly Unsupportive	1	0	0	1	
Unsupportive	25	6	0	31	
Neutral	261	76	1	338	15.61*
Supportive	20	12	1	33	
Strongly Supportive	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	307	94	2	403	

*P<.05

TABLE 8

CROSSTABULATION OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22) WITH STUDENT POPULATION OF RESPONDENTS (Question 5)

Response Category	Student Population Frequency							Total	Chi-Square
	Less than 300	301 to 600	601 to 900	901 to 1200	1201 to 1600	1601 to 2000	over 2000		
Strongly Unsupportive	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	
Unsupportive	4	13	9	2	1	2	0	31	
Neutral	45	139	97	38	9	9	1	338	8.52*
Supportive	5	10	13	2	2	1	0	33	
Strongly Supportive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	54	162	120	42	12	12	1	403	

*P<.05

Pearson's coefficient of correlation (Table 3) shcws no association between the two variables. On the basis, of this analysis, it can be determined that student population is not a factor which impacts on the degree of support expressed for ability grouping.

Finally, to answer the sixth subsidiary question, the investigators analyzed the relationship between the total mean score of principals on the instrument relative to percentage of minority students in their school. Tables 3 and 9 both indicate that the difference between principals relative to the percentage of minority student were not significant at the .05 level. Therefore, on the basis of this analysis, it is determined that a relationship does not exist between the expressed attitudes of these principals toward ability grouping relative to the percentage of minority students enrolled in their school.

Part III

Additional Findings

In order to determine if there were any aspects of ability grouping in which principals appear to be more unsupportive or supportive, the investigators analyzed the expressed attitudes of principals on four individual statements:

1. Ability grouping is beneficial for minority students (question 14).
2. Ability grouping plans often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups (question 18).
3. Being poor or black causes teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to the bottom group (question 19).
4. Parents are given an opportunity to help decide which tracks their child is assigned (question 22).

TABLE 9

CROSSTABULATION OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES ON THE ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM (Questions 7-22) WITH PERCENTAGE OF MINORITY STUDENTS OF RESPONDENTS (Question 6)

Response Category	Percentage of Minority Student Frequency				Total	Chi-Square
	Less than 10%	10 to 25%	25 to 50%	Over 50%		
Strongly Unsupportive	0	0	1	0	1	
Unsupportive	3	11	4	13	31	
Neutral	38	70	125	104	337	15.90*
Supportive	4	3	10	16	33	
Strongly Supportive	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	45	84	140	133	402	

*P<.05

Pertinent to the preceeding four aspects of ability grouping, Tables 10-13 will show the total mean score tabulated for all principals on four individual attitudinal statements, questions 14, 18, 19 and 22, respectively. Each of these tables will also show the percentage of respondents with mean scores ranging from strongly unsupportive responses to strongly supportive responses.

Table 10 shows that the mean score for the first aspect of ability grouping (question 14) was 3.5 since the mean score for all respondents was at least 3.1, it is concluded that these principals support the statement that ability grouping is beneficial for minority students.

Table 11 indicates that the mean score for the second aspect of ability grouping (question 18) was 3.3. Since the mean score for all respondents was at least 3.1, it is determined that these principals support the statement that ability grouping plans often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups.

Table 12 reveals that the mean score for the third aspect of ability grouping (question 19) was 3.5. Since the mean score was at least 3.1, it is concluded that these principals support the statement that being poor or black causes teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to the bottom group.

Finally, table 13 shows that the mean score for the first aspects of ability grouping was 3.5. Since the mean score for these principals was at least 3.1, it is determined that these principals support the statement that parents are given an opportunity to help decide to which tracks their child is assigned.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A major finding of this study was that principals do not express attitudes toward ability grouping that can be characterized as supportive and facilitative.

TABLE 10

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES TO PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE BENEFIT OF ABILITY GROUPING FOR MINORITY STUDENTS (Question 14)*

Mean Score Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score Range
Strongly Unsupportive Responses	27	5.3	1.0-1.9
Unsupportive Responses	106	20.9	2.0-2.9
Neutral Responses	59	11.7	3.0-3.9
Supportive Responses	238	47.0	4.0-4.9
Strongly Supportive Responses	76	15.0	5.0
TOTAL	506	100	1.0-5.0

*Mean Score = 3.5

Standard Deviation = 1.13

TABLE 11

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES TO PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ABILITY GROUPING OFTEN RESULTING IN RACIALLY ETHNICALLY IDENTIFIABLE TRACKS/GROUPS (Question 18)*

Mean Score Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score Range
Strongly Unsupportive Responses	29	5.7	1.0-1.9
Unsupportive Responses	139	27.4	2.0-2.9
Neutral Responses	74	14.6	3.0-3.9
Supportive Responses	205	40.4	4.0-4.9
Strongly Supportive Responses	60	11.8	5.0
TOTAL	507	100	

*Mean Score = 3.3
Standard Deviation = 1.15

TABLE 12

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES TO PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD BEING POOR OR BLACK CAUSING A TEACHER TO LOWER EXPECTATIONS AND ASSIGNING THESE STUDENTS TO THE BOTTOM GROUP (Question 19)*

Mean Score Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score Range
Strongly Unsupportive Responses	26	5.1	1.0-1.9
Unsupportive Responses	95	18.6	2.0-2.9
Neutral Responses	70	13.7	3.0-3.9
Supportive Responses	247	48.2	4.0-4.9
Strongly Supportive Responses	74	14.5	5.0
TOTAL	512	100	

*Mean Score = 3.5

Standard Deviation = 1.10

TABLE 13

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORE RESPONSES TO PRINCIPAL ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENTS BEING GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP DECIDE WHICH TRACKS THEIR CHILD IS ASSIGNED (Question 22)*

Mean Score Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score Range
Strongly Unsupportive Responses	27	5.5	1.0-1.9
Unsupportive Responses	97	19.7	2.0-2.9
Neutral Responses	37	7.5	3.0-3.9
Supportive Responses	291	59.1	4.0-4.9
Strongly Supportive Responses	40	8.1	5.0
TOTAL	492	100	

*Mean Score = _____

Standard Deviation = _____

Other related findings were as follows:

- There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of elementary and secondary principals toward ability grouping.
- There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to years of experience as principal.
- There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of male and female principals toward ability grouping.
- There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of black and white principals toward ability grouping.
- There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of principals toward ability grouping relative to the student population of their schools.
- There was no significant difference in the expressed attitudes of principals relative to the percentage of minority students in their schools.

These findings are important because they suggest that principals tend not to feel that ability grouping/tracking in the school have any significant impact on educational outcomes. Also, differences in expressed attitudes may not be contributed to such demographic variables as division of school administration, experience as a principal, sex, ethnic, affiliation, student population and percentage of minority students.

Pertinent to specific aspects of ability grouping, there were the following additional findings:

- These principals expressed support for the statement that ability grouping is beneficial for minority students.
- These principals expressed support for the statment that ability grouping plans often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups.

- These principals expressed support for the statement that being poor or black causes teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to the bottom group.
- These principals expressed support for the statement that parents are given an opportunity to help decide which tracks their child is assigned.

These findings are important because they suggest that there are aspects of ability grouping in which principals are more unsupportive or supportive. Also, these findings suggest a continuing transition in the attitudes of these principals toward specific aspects of ability grouping since ability grouping was considered to be beneficial for minority students although being poor or black was felt to cause teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to their bottom group.

A major implication of this study is that principals have become sensitive and could continue to grow professionally by being exposed to the impact and fairness of ability grouping and other instructional practices. With the many different effective instructional appraoches, ability grouping may not be needed. However, many educators would need assistance in moving to a higher level of teaching proficiency. Also, sufficient funding for education is necessary to ensure the most managable class sizes for optimal heterogeneous grouping.

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APPENDIX

ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM

ABILITY GROUPING ASSESSMENT FORM

This questionnaire is intended to provide you with an opportunity to indicate your feelings about ability grouping in your school. Our hope is that the results of the questionnaire will provide useful information for determining the degree to which principals feel that ability grouping can contribute to the quality of education in their schools.

It is important that you answer each question as thoughtfully and honestly as possible. Your answers will be confidential, therefore, it is not expected that you place your name anywhere on this questionnaire.

Please return your completed questionnaire to Clemson University in the stamped, self-addressed envelope at your earliest convenience.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Part I of this questionnaire, we would like for you to answer six background questions.

1. What is the divisional level of the school in which you are presently serving? (circle one)

   A. Elementary School
   B. Middle School/Junior High School
   C. High School

2. How many years have you served as a school principal? (Circle one and specify the exact number of years in the parenthesis located beside your answer.)

   A. Less than one year ( )
   B. Between one and three years ( )
   C. Between four and six years ( )
   D. Between seven and nine years ( )
   E. Between ten and twelve years ( )
   G. Over fifteen years ( )

3. What is your sex? (circle one)

   A. Male
   B. Female

4. What is your racial/ethnical background? (circle one)

   A. Black
   B. White
   C. Native American
   D. Asian American
   E. Hispanic-speaking American
   F. Other (please specific)

5. What is the student population of your school? (Circle one and specify the exact student population in the parenthesis located beside your answer).

   A. Less than 300 students ( )
   B. Between 301 and 600 students ( )
   C. Between 601 and 900 students ( )
   D. Between 901 and 1,200 students ( )
   E. Between 1,201 and 1,600 students ( )
   F. Between 1,601 and 2,000 students ( )
   G. Over 2,000 students ( )

6. What is the percentage of minority students in your school? (circle one)

   A. Less than 10%
   B. Between 10% and 25%
   C. Between 25% and 50%
   D. Greater than 50%

ATTITUDINAL QUESTIONS

In this section of the questionnaire, we are interested in your opinion about a series of statements concerning various aspects of ability grouping/tracking in the affairs of a public school. Please feel free to express your personal opinion since there are no right or wrong answers.

For each of the remaining statements, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by circling one of five possible answers ("Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Unsure", "Agree", or "Strongly Agree".) Beside each statement, circle the number below the answer corresponding to your feeling about the statement.

	SD	D	U	A	SA
7. Ability grouping is necessary for successful teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The procedures, policies and criteria for assigning students to advanced, and basic courses are objective, unbiased and applied in a consistent manner.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The procedures, policies and criteria for assigning students do not affect minority students in terms of the ratio at which they are assigned to advanced and basic classes in relation to whites.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Ability grouping is an undemocratic practice with negative effects on children.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Ability grouping is beneficial for low aptitude students.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Ability grouping is beneficial for middle aptitude students.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Ability grouping is beneficial for high aptitude students.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Ability grouping is beneficial for minority students.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Schools can best deal with individual differences in ability by dividing students into smaller groups within heterogenous classes.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Students from higher socioeconomic origins are over represented in the academic classes.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Academic track students experience classroom environments that are more favorable to learning.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Ability grouping plans often results in racially or ethnically identifiable tracks or groups.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Being poor or black cause teachers to lower their expectations and assign these students to the bottom group.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The decision to place students in each track is determined by test results.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The decision to place students in each track is determined by the principal, counselor and/or teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Parents are given an opportunity to help decide to which track their child is assigned.	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer questions 23-26 as they relate to your particular school.

23. My school offers classes geared towards a minimum of three ability levels	1	2	3	4	5
24. My school has two levels of classes available to students.	1	2	3	4	5
25. My school offers classes without regard to ability levels.	1	2	3	4	5

26. The percentage of minority students in the lowest level classes in my school is (circle one)
    A. less than 10%
    B. between 10% and 25%
    C. between 25% and 50%
    D. Greater than 50%

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Optional)

Please provide any additional comments that you may have about ability grouping/tracking in the space below. Specifically, you may discuss possible strengths, possible weaknesses, extent of your involvement as an educator, and any unique experience pertinent to ability grouping.